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DEPT FOR EUR/SCE and DS/DSS/ATA

E.O. 12958: DECL:03/19/17  
TAGS: [PTER](#) [KISL](#) [PREL](#) [SR](#)  
SUBJECT: ARRESTS OF WAHABBIS IN SOUTHWEST SERBIA

Classified by: Ambassador Michael Polt, reasons 1.4 (b,d)

11. (U) This is an action request for DS/DSS/ATA; see paragraph 5.

12. (U) Four men were arrested near Sijenica, in the Muslim-majority Sandzak region of Serbia March 16, at what authorities allege is a terrorist training camp for a group that was plotting to attack moderate Sandzak Mufti Muamer Zukorlic and to blow up the Novi Pazar mosque. The men were found with automatic rifles, explosives, and RPGs. Local press reported that one member of the group remains at large, and say their sources believe there are as many as 30 members of this group that move around the Sandzak region, regularly changing location. Rasim Ljajic, President of the Sandzak Democratic Party (SDP) and a Zukorlic ally, told local media that the Wahabbis should not be underestimated, and that the best way to combat their influence is to strengthen the moderate Islamic community in the region.

13. (S) Zukorlic, who told the press he is not surprised by the plot, told emboffs there were 11 more men in the group, and that he believes they are still planning to assassinate him. Zukorlic believes the goal of these Wahabbis is to destabilize the local moderate Muslim community. He told us he believes these men came to Sandzak from Bosnia, not as part of the official Sarajevo Islamic Community, but rather an extremist element likely funded and/or supported from outside the country. He believes this incident underlines the need for a unified Islamic Community in Serbia, as a fragmented community opens the possibility of extremism.

14. (S) Interior Minister Dragan Jovic told the media that the arrests show the determination and preparedness of state authorities to prevent violence and terrorism. He claims this was a small, closed group with well-trained members. We are preparing a statement commending the MUP for their action. Meanwhile, the local MUP chief in Novi Pazar told emboffs that police have found a second cache of weapons and supplies, and that this second cache included MANPADS.

15. (C) COMMENT AND ACTION REQUEST: Zukorlic is in the middle of a political tug-of-war with rivals in Belgrade for control of Serbia's Islamic community - thus the references to the need to unify the community. Despite some questions about his ties to Sarajevo, Zukorlic has consistently been a force for moderation and engagement in the Serbian Islamic community; he is politically closest to Ljajic, but has also used his influence in the community in support of Tadic in the past. In a March 16 meeting with the Ambassador, Zukorlic requested assistance with training for his personal security detail. This incident lends some urgency to that request. We would welcome Washington's input regarding possible training opportunities that can be made available to Zukorlic's security staff through the ATA program or other means.

POLT